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SUBJECT: KURDISH INTELLECTUALS ON DTP CLOSURE, YOUTH
RADICALIZATION

REF: A. 09 ANKARA 1782
[1](#)B. 09 ANKARA 1791
[1](#)C. 09 ANKARA 1479

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL SHARON A. WIENER FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In meetings following closure of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), Istanbul-based Kurdish intellectuals railed against the Turkish Constitutional Court's decision to close the DTP. They predicted most DTP members would migrate to the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the party's closure would further undermine the government's National Unity Project. Our contacts argued the recent closure of DTP differed from previous closures of Kurdish political parties because the National Unity Project has raised public expectations on the Kurdish issue. One contact suggested the Justice and Development Party (AKP) could increase confidence among Kurds by taking steps such as lowering the national election threshold and amending the law on closure of political parties, but most interlocutors failed to suggest a coherent way forward that accounted for the current political context. All agreed, however, that without concrete steps to increase the legal rights of Turkey's Kurdish population, the ongoing radicalization of Kurdish youth will continue. End Summary.

REACTIONS TO DTP CLOSURE

[1](#)2. (C) In separate meetings during the two weeks following closure of the DTP, Poloff discussed the current political situation with Kurdish journalist and human rights activist Umit Firat, Kurdish Institute Director Sami Tan, and five Kurdish intellectuals from the unregistered group Demos. In a December 16 meeting with Poloff, Firat -- who is widely consulted by the media as a moderate Kurdish voice -- said while there were many legitimate reasons behind the DTP's closure, not least the fact that it was unquestionably controlled by the PKK, closing the party still marks a negative turn for Turkey. He anticipated that almost all members of the now-defunct DTP would join the BDP (ref A), and that another small Kurdish party would co-exist as a contingency in case of a future BDP closure. Firat said there is a trend toward increasing radicalism among Kurdish youth, and he anticipated that BDP would be Turkey's most radical Kurdish political party yet, a trend the PKK is encouraging. (Comment: Firat seemed pessimistic about the possibility of a smaller, less radical Kurdish party forming in the aftermath of the DTP's closure, but acknowledged that Kurds who have migrated to Istanbul and other large cities may continue to push for change within the AKP. End comment.)

[1](#)3. (C) On December 22, Sami Tan of the Kurdish Institute

agreed DTP,s closure marked a very negative, if not unexpected, turn, and anticipated that there would be no major difference between DTP and BDP. Demos member Kemal Parlak, previously a member of DTP's Party Assembly, said BDP would more or less be a replica of the DTP, although he did not dismiss the possibility that the party,s leadership might be more cautious and patient on some issues than its predecessor.

"CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE CHANGED"

¶4. (C) Although five Kurdish political parties have previously closed in Turkey, Firat said the DTP closure is different because "circumstances have changed" in Turkey. The AKP government's National Unity Project (previously known as the "Democratic Opening," or "Kurdish Opening") has raised expectations and the Kurdish population has become more politicized. Tan echoed Firat's sentiment that the DTP closure is different from past party closures given the backdrop of the National Unity Project. He added that the DTP's organization and grassroots mobilization -* which were stronger than previous Kurdish political parties *- also are a marked difference. Firat said while the PKK was pleased by closure of former Kurdish political parties, because previous Kurdish parties posed a threat to the PKK, the DTP's allegedly closer links to the PKK mean that the PKK will react more strongly against this closure. (Comment: Firat did not explain why the DTP was closer to the PKK than previous Kurdish political parties, but it is plausible that mainstream Kurds may be supporting non-Kurdish parties such

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as AKP in greater numbers. In the 2007 elections, 95 percent of voters in Turkey's southeast cast their ballots for DTP and AKP. Significant numbers voted for AKP, presumably hoping Erdogan would make good on his 2005 promise to solve the Kurdish issue once and for all. End Comment.) According to Firat, the PKK is opposed to the National Unity Project and other progress on the Kurdish issue because of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's concern that if Kurdish demands are met by the national government, the PKK will eventually be dissolved.

KURDS NEED A LEADER

¶5. (C) Firat lamented the lack of "Ghandi-style" leadership among the Kurdish population in Turkey, and said Kurdish leaders are responsible for inciting violence and provoking the Kurdish population. Ocalan continues to be the primary leader for the Kurds and his messages are designed to incite violence; according to Firat, Ocalan's recent statements regarding his deteriorating health were intended as a signal for Kurds to take to the streets. Asked whether there are any moderate Kurdish political leaders on the horizon, Firat said there are only people like himself, with no mass following, who try to offer hope and morale to the Kurdish population. Government unwillingness to undertake legal reform aimed at protecting Kurdish rights impede his ability to lead, however; he said that the government should support moderate leaders and take more concrete action to answer Kurdish demands.

CRITICAL OF NATIONAL UNITY PROJECT

¶6. (C) Tan and others were extremely critical of the government's National Unity Project. Tan said that the project cannot succeed because the process has excluded Kurds from the beginning (Note: Members of the Demos group shared this complaint, and said the AKP relied on a small number of consultants to plan the project, none of them Kurds. The Demos members underscored that Kurds perceived the AKP as insincere and driven by external political calculations in

its project. End Note.). Although certain positive steps have been taken, he said, they are tiny compared even with the rights Kurds already had, and therefore have made very little impact. For example, although the opening of Kurdish language TRT-Shesh was a positive step, Kurds already had access via satellite to more than 20 Kurdish language stations, so in reality the new station does not add much to the picture beyond symbolism. Tan said that in order to show concrete movement, the AKP should pass legislation to make closure of political parties more difficult, should lower the national threshold for elections, and should "clarify" Ocalan's situation.

17. (C) Ibrahim Sinemillioglu, a lawyer in the Demos group, said although the National Unity Project started with "big statements," in practice it has been one step forward and two steps back. Parlak added the AKP was unprepared for the National Unity Project and did not meet opposition parties or even make an effort to be convincing when they talked about forming a relationship with the DTP. He said the government should decrease the national threshold for elections from 10 percent to five or six percent, which would be a concrete step that would be viewed positively by Kurds.

18. (C) Despite these problems, Firat contended the AKP has no choice but to continue the National Unity Project. It would be politically impossible to reverse its policy and a reversal would create a "fiasco" that would spell the end of the AKP. Asked why the government should continue the National Unity Project despite opposition from most political camps, Firat said although there was political opposition, the general population was slowly beginning to reap the benefits of some of the services provided by the government, and pointed to TRT-Shesh as an example. Firat said AKP's survival was tied up in the Project; with only a year and a half before general elections, AKP must continue to move ahead and should take more concrete steps to implement ideas that so far have only been discussed. These steps, however, will always be regarded as politically-driven gestures without widespread impact, unless the government undertakes concrete legal reforms aimed at protecting the rights of Kurds. Demos member Faik Bulut also noted that even though the AKP's project is not succeeding, it is laying the

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foundation for a future solution and may slowly be changing expectations.

RADICALIZATION OF KURDISH YOUTH -----

19. (C) Most Kurds, according to Firat, are more hopeful and less radical than they were in the 1990s, but an increasingly vocal minority has become even more radicalized due to the National Unity Project and other perceived threats to the PKK. Firat estimated approximately 25 to 30 percent of Turkey's Kurdish population considers Ocalan to be its political leader and is open to violent mobilization. Unfortunately, he said, the more moderate 70 percent is not prepared to counter-demonstrate because, by nature, they are not people prone to political mobilization. Most of the radicalization is among Kurdish youth who have no particular political goal and are frustrated with what they view as a hopeless situation. The youth bulge suggests that radicalization will continue: according to Firat, 48 percent of the population of Diyarbakir is under the age of 19. Demos member Abdullah Amac, an economist, said that around 40 percent of Turkey's Kurds are young and increasingly politicized partly because of their uncritical embrace of technology, such as the internet. He said this population is "like a treasury" of recruits for the PKK. Demos member Bulut commented that his generation of Kurds --* those now middle aged --* are the last generation which can act as a bridge between the state and the PKK. The young generation, he said,

should be called the "separatist generation" due to their radical political views.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Our interlocutors presented a gloomy forecast of what is to come, echoing recent columnists' statements on a division within the Kurdish population and growing fears among a vocal but radical minority that a successful National Unity Project could spell the end of the PKK. Despite this forecast, most were unable to suggest a constructive way to address the Kurdish problem in Turkey that takes into account the current political context. The argument that certain elements of the Kurdish population will always oppose a government opening toward the Kurds as a threat to the PKK is becoming more widespread in Turkey as the National Unity Project is increasingly perceived as dividing instead of uniting. Although the various Kurdish thinkers agree in principle that legal reforms to protect the rights of Kurds are necessary, their inability to agree upon whether details such as TRT-Shesh are positive steps or not suggests that part of the problem in mobilizing Kurds is their own inability to agree on what it is that they want. The loudest voice speaking for the Kurds, however unproductively, remains the PKK. Without a coherent, mainstream political alternative, Ocalan will continue to set the agenda for the Kurds.

WIENER